

Prison Legal News

Dedicated to Protecting Human Rights

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May 15, 2007

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Ms. Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Reply Comment Regarding CC Docket No. 96-128 (Implementation of Pay Telephone Reclassification and Compensation Provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 1996)

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On April 19, 2007 I submitted a letter in reference to CC Docket No. 96-128 (the *Wright* petition), in my capacity as Associate Editor for *Prison Legal News*, a non profit, nationally-distributed publication that reports on criminal justice and corrections-related issues.

In that letter I said, "almost 70% [of prisoners] perform at the lowest levels of reading and are considered functionally illiterate...." That statement was made in the context that phone calls provide an important link between prisoners who have literacy problems and their families and children.

In response to an inquiry from Commission staff regarding the basis for that statement, I refer the Commission to a 1992 report by the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), which can be found at the link cited below.

The relevant section states, "In 1992, 40% of the prison population was at quantitative literacy Level 1, compared to 22% of the household population; 32% were at Level 2, compared to 25% of the household population; 22% were at Level 3, compared to 31% of the household population; 6% were at Level 4, compared to 17%

of the household population; and 1% were at Level 5, compared to 4% of the household population (Haigler, p19, Table 2.3)." See:

<http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/facts/NALS.html>

For a more detailed analysis, please see the following link for a report on the 1992 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) study of prisoners, which states, "About 7 in 10 prisoners perform in Levels 1 and 2 on the prose, document, and quantitative scales. These prisoners are apt to experience difficulty in performing tasks that require them to integrate or synthesize information from complex or lengthy texts or to perform quantitative tasks that involve two or more sequential operations and that require the individual to set up the problem."

<http://nces.ed.gov/naal/index.asp?file=OtherResources/ExecSumLitBehindPrison.asp&PageId=157>

Also see the following link to the National Adult Literacy Database, which describes the two lowest levels of literacy in relation to illiteracy rates for prisoners (with footnotes):

<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/hudson/bringing/page06.htm>

There is a more recent and comprehensive 2003 report from the National Center for Education Statistics available at the following link; however, please note that the definitions for the lowest literacy levels may not be completely identical between the 1992 and 2003 reports:

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2007473>

Also note that levels of illiteracy among prisoners vary according to the study and other factors (e.g., prison vs. jail populations). For example, a 2005 UK study found that about half of prisoners suffered from "poor literacy and numeracy skills; 1998 test results from the UK prison service found 60% of prisoners "had problems with literacy, and 40% had a severe literacy problem." And according to a report from the director general of HM Prison Service, "Half of all prisoners have serious problems with reading, two-thirds with numeracy and four-fifths with writing." For references please see the following link:

<http://www.nationalliteracytrust.org.uk/Database/stats/keystats3.html>

I trust this information will prove helpful; please do not hesitate to contact me should the Commission require any additional information on this point or related to other issues raised in my letter regarding the *Wright* petition.

Sincerely,

Alex Friedmann
Associate Editor, PLN

cc: Paul Wright, PLN Editor